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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001760

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU GOVERNOR HAPPY WITH STATUS QUO

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

1. (C) SUMMARY: North Kivu governor Serufuli told the Ambassador Sept. 9 the FDLR remains a threat but Laurent Nkunda does not, and his policy is "good relations with all," Kinshasa and neighboring countries included. He is keen to promote foreign business investment in the province, and traveled to the western U.S. in 2002 partly to do so. Serufuli appears quite happy with the political status quo, with his own position recognized by but not subordinate to Kinshasa and his potential rivals in the RCD-Goma all in the capital. END SUMMARY.

I'm OK, You're OK

2. (C) North Kivu provincial governor Eugene Serufuli told the Ambassador and poloff Sept. 9 that although FDLR guerillas do continue to commit acts of banditry and prey on the rural population, renegade former RCD-Goma officer Laurent Nkunda "is a myth" and poses virtually no threat whatsoever. Serufuli said he communicates directly with President Kabila on a regular basis, and wants to maintain "good relations with all," the Congo's neighbors included. To this end, at Serufuli's initiative Ugandan and Congolese local authorities at several points along the border have begun to meet regularly. Also, until Sept. 8 he was in Beni and Butembo in the northern part of the province, where he had traveled to coordinate with local officials. (Comment: The Beni-Butembo area, also known as the "Grand Nord," is only nominally under Serufuli's control; it remains essentially a fiefdom of Mbusa Nyamwisi's RCD-K/ML movement. End Comment.) Indeed, he claimed credit by virtue of his presentations while on tour for having coaxed out of the bush 600 Mai-Mai combatants. MONUC and humanitarian representatives confirmed to us that 600 Mai-Mai had indeed presented themselves unexpectedly in Beni the previous day, provoking some consternation in the local office to come up with instant logistics and other arrangements to take care of them and transport them to a temporary camp.

Open for Business

3. (C) Serufuli also mentioned that he had traveled to Washington state and California in 2002, a trip partly for pleasure and partly to drum up business interest in his province. Unfortunately, because U.S. businessmen continue to have a negative perception of the situation in the Kivus and the Congo, he failed to attract any interest. Serufuli declined to name his U.S. contacts, aside from an NGO based in Santa Barbara, California with whom he had discussed the possibility of transporting quantities of medical supplies to the Congo. (Bio Note: Serufuli was trained and worked as an anaesthesiologist before embarking on his current career. End Note.) He claimed that the NGO was on the verge of sending the supplies but in August 2003 decided not to, and inquired whether or not Embassy Kinshasa turned it off because the USG still considered Serfuli a rebel. (Comment: The proposed deal was news to us. End Comment.)

COMMENT

4. (C) Serufuli was prominently sporting a national DRC flag lapel pin, presumably intended to bolster his credentials as a loyal servant of the government, consistent with the language he used. His accompanying chief of staff, however, appeared somewhat less nimble, occasionally lapsing to heap blame on Kinshasa for all manner of ills, likely a somewhat accurate reflection of prevailing sentiment within the current North Kivu provincial government. Serufuli, a North Kivu Hutu, appears a clever politician but his rosy picture of the security situation and downplaying of the Nkunda threat did not ring true. Nor for that matter his assertions that he no longer controls any militia force, a position at odds with reports from virtually all other observers including locally-based MONUC staff. Our sense is that he is relatively happy with the status quo. Kinshasa has formally recognized him as governor, but has little control over what he does, while other rivals in the RCD-Goma are all now back in the capital thousands of miles away from constituent support in the Kivus. We suspect that Serufuli would like to keep everyone slightly off balance, with neither Kinshasa nor Kigali, much less any local forces, gaining a decisive upper

hand in his home region while he seeks to continue to build
his own base and maintain a juggling act with other competing
forces. END COMMENT.
MEECE